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AUTHOR	Fox, Candace K.; Laster, Janet F.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine which of the following modes of professional practice is the dominant mode used by Ohio family and consumer science (FCS) teachers when implementing a refined critical science based curriculum: technical-rational; reflective-ethical; and process-oriented. The target population consisted of 1,013 secondary teachers who were teaching one or more of Ohio's six core work and family life courses. The sample included 45 teachers who had participated in the Ohio secondary teacher-leader institutes and a random sample chosen from Ohio's 968 remaining FCS secondary school teachers. Usable questionnaires were returned by 267 (60%) of the 495 teachers who received questionnaires. According to the researchers, great emphasis has been placed on encouraging teachers to integrate the four process modules into the beginning of each semester course, so it was no surprise that the process-oriented mode proved to be the dominant mode used by 204 (68.7%) of the teachers. More surprising to the researchers was that only 11.1% of the teachers used the reflective-ethical mode of practice. Of those surveyed, 64% indicated that they are emphasizing critical thinking tools in their classrooms "a good deal" or "most of the time" and 73.1% reported also probing their students' ethical thinking. It was concluded that efforts to move Ohio FCS teachers to the reflective-ethical model of professional practice must continue and that professional development experiences should incorporate what is known about professional development, be readily accessible to teachers, and encouraged by local school administrations. (MN)

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THE MODE OF PROFESSIONAL TEACHING PRACTICE OF FCS TEACHER-LEADERS AND NON-TEACHER-LEADERS

Candace K. Fox, Ph. D., Mount Vernon Nazarene University
Janet F. Laster, Ph. D., The Ohio State University

ED 476 903

Introduction and Statement of the Problem:

The constructs of practical reasoning, practical problem solving and critical thinking, and related interpersonal, management, citizenship, and leadership processes are complex and require much reflective thinking. Implementation of this critical science, problem-based, or any new curriculum is not easy. When presented with a curriculum based on these constructs, will teachers be willing to implement this complex perspective? As with any curriculum reform, steps must be taken to make certain that the change or implementation will occur. Ohio curriculum planners and state leaders wonder to what extent the teachers are implementing the new curriculum paradigm, including co-creating the curriculum with their students and grappling with authentic, real-life problems, using practical reasoning, interpersonal relationship, leadership, and management process concepts and skills to resolve perennial and evolving family and consumer science problems. The purpose of the study was to determine Ohio Work and Family Life secondary teachers' dominant mode of professional practice when implementing a refined critical science-based curriculum: Technical-Rational Mode, Reflective-Ethical Mode, or Process-Oriented Mode.

Theoretical Base and Related Literature:

Although the philosophical orientation of the curriculum had changed, the family and consumer sciences profession had not extensively examined the professional practices of the teachers in the classroom as they implemented the FCS curriculum. Wilson and Vaines (1985) described professional practice as teachers' persistent patterns of action and involvement in certain identifiable ranges of activities. They identified four dimensions of a theoretical framework for the examination of family and consumer sciences teaching practice with each dimension having a different mode of inquiry, purpose of practice, and system of action. If one of the intentions of the Ohio Work and Family Life curriculum resource guides was to help teachers use the three systems of action, commonly called Technical or Instrumental, Interpretive or Communicative, and Reflective or Emancipatory, then it should be determined whether the teachers were indeed utilizing the different systems and modes of inquiry.

Professional teaching practice can be defined as the process of translating knowledge into activities associated with a practical field of study (Vaines, 1997). The level to which the recommended curriculum paradigm, as reflected by the student learning processes and content that were conceptualized by the curriculum developers of the discipline, is taught or facilitated by the classroom teacher comprises the concept of curriculum implementation. Thus, professional teaching practices are used to facilitate student learning processes and content which is the process of implementing the curriculum.

Curriculum planners and leaders need to know if the curriculum framework and philosophy is being used to help validate the effort and expense that went into its development. Also, the extent to which the curriculum is being implemented could have

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implications for future professional development experiences. To assess the learning outcomes of the curriculum with secondary students, it is also necessary to know at what level the curriculum perspective is being practiced.

Research Methods and Procedures:

The target population for this study included 1,013 secondary teachers in Ohio, teaching one or more of the six core Work and Family Life courses. The sample was composed of two groups: (a) approximately 45 teachers who had participated in the Ohio secondary Teacher-Leader Institutes, i.e., Teacher-Leaders and (b) a random sample chosen from the remaining 968 Ohio Work and Family Life secondary teachers, i.e., non-Teacher-Leaders. A booklet containing four instruments (Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher Beliefs Scale, FCS Curriculum Implementation, Teacher Efficacy Scale, and Professional Characteristics of Family and Consumer Sciences Teachers) was mailed. The total number of teachers, including Teacher-Leaders, who returned useable questionnaires was 297 or 60% of the 495 total questionnaires mailed.

The mode of professional practice for implementing the Ohio process-oriented curriculum was determined by a researcher-developed self-report measure, FCS Curriculum Implementation scale (FCSCI). The instrument was projected to determine if what is occurring in the Ohio Work and Family Life classrooms actually reflects the intended Reflective-Ethical, i.e., practical-problem based, process-oriented perspective rather than a Technical-Rational based curriculum m perspective. To determine the teacher's dominant mode of practice, each teacher's mean scores for the three subscales were compared and the highest mean score was identified as that teacher's dominant mode. The reliability of the instrument as calculated for this study yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .87 overall, which was deemed acceptable.

Findings and Conclusions:

The majority of Ohio Work and Family Life secondary teachers' dominant mode of professional practice was the Process-Oriented mode with over two-thirds (n=204, 68.7%) of the teachers using that mode of practice. Great emphasis has been placed on encouraging teachers to integrate the four process modules into the beginning of each semester course. Therefore, it was expected that the Process-Oriented items would be practices the teachers are doing often. However, finding that only 11.1% of the teachers used the Reflective-Ethical mode of practice was disappointing. Proponents of the practical problem solving/critical science perspective have long advocated going beyond technical action to reach the reflective thinking necessary to take ethical action in the best interests of others. Perhaps teaching in a reflective and ethical mode is more difficult for the teachers than teaching in the process-oriented mode, which is very close in interpretation.

An adhoc analysis of the items on the FCSI scale was conducted to further clarify the teaching practices of Ohio Work and Family Life teachers. One notable finding was that the majority (64%) of the teachers indicated that they are emphasizing critical thinking tools in their classrooms "a good deal" or "most of the time". The majority (73.1%) is also probing ethical thinking of their students. Although Reflective-Ethical practice was not their dominant mode, the teachers appear to be incorporating the major point of the curriculum perspective. Another positive finding was that the teachers

claimed to spend little time teaching their students the one right way to solve problems. Examining alternative ways to solve problems is a foundational point of Reflective-Ethical practice and the practical problem-based curriculum.

Implications and Recommendations:

Efforts to move teachers to the Reflective-Ethical mode of professional practice need to continue. The finding that more of the teachers are practicing in a Process-Oriented mode than a Technical-Rational mode should be rewarding for the FCS Division of the State Department of Education and university personnel responsible for the professional development programs that have expended resources towards that goal. Continuing to increase teachers' and preservice teachers' understanding of the critical science curriculum perspective and supporting the teachers as they implement the curriculum are important goals.

For teachers to practice in the Reflective-Ethical mode more often, they need to understand the paradigm and its importance. Professional development experiences should incorporate what is known about successful professional development, be readily accessible to the teachers, and be encouraged by the local school administration.

It is possible that the paper-and-pencil instrument used in this study was not able to determine reflective and ethical mode of professional practice. A qualitative research study involving teacher interviews would allow the reflective thinking of teachers to be conveyed and would be powerful evidence of their specific practice and help validate or revise the instrument items.

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Signature: Candace K. Fox	Printed Name/Position/Title: Candace K. Fox Ph.D.	
Organization/Address: Mount Vernon Nazarene Univ.	Telephone: 740-392-6868	FAX: 740-397-2769
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